CHRISTIAN DRAMA

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GENERAL CHALLENGER

"There is indeed some tenderness due to living writers, when they attack none of those truths which are of importance to the happiness of mankind, and have committed no other offence than that of betraying their own ignorance and dullness. I should think it cruelty to crush an insect who had provoked me only by buzzing in my ear; and would not willingly interrupt the dream of harmless stupidity or destroy the jest which makes its author laugh.

"Yet I am far from thinking this tenderness universally necessary, for he that writes may be considered as a kind of general challenger whom everyone has a right to attack, since he quits the common rank of life, steps forward beyond the lists, and offers his merit to the public judgment. To commence author is to claim praise, and no man can justly aspire to honour but at the hazard of disgrace."

This bucketful is drawn out of that deep well of sense which is Johnson's *Rambler*. The words seem to have particular application to our Society at the point of its development reached when E. Martin Browne made his speech at the Annual General Meeting, reviewing our aspirations and estimating the hazards that lie before us. It is perhaps appropriate to take stock of our situation, now that by his acceptance of the post of Director of the British Drama League, Mr. Martin Browne closes a chapter of his service to the Religious Drama Society and ceases to be our Hon. Director. This change, which might have been a heavy blow to the Society, has been mitigated by the fact that his loss is mainly titular. He has stipulated that he should not be debarred from continuing his work for the Society, and in reality his new appointment will only affect us directly in that, to avoid confusion of titles, we accept his resignation as Hon. Director to welcome him again as Chairman of the Executive. Although this may happily result in an even closer bond of friendship between the two Societies, there is neither desire nor intention on either side that the relationship between the two should change in any other way.

Apart from this, how are we faring?

We have had a magazine for a year ; we have published some plays; we have read a lot of others; we have benefited by the labours of our permanent staff ; the librarian has sent out 125 packets of books each month to subscribers, the demand for play-sets grows so that we can't supply it fully, we have 550 different titles on the shelves and a noble company of Girl Guides repairing the casualties ; the Travelling Adviser darts from end to end of the country, " toiling, rejoicing, sorrowing," meeting, conferring, rehearsing, observing, reporting; the Secretary deals with all office problems, with the mounting correspondence brought by increased membership (doubled in two years); he fights the ever-present shadow of deficit, cheers the faint-hearted and cools the ardours of the hothead, and always is subject to the tensions involved in trying to serve God and circumvent Mammon : and it 's all a matter for congratulation and good feeling.

So, one might well think, everything in the R.D.S. garden is as rosy as a flower show.

But look again at Dr. Johnson's words. We have " quitted the common ranks of life ". We step forward " beyond the lists ", and offer our merit " to public judgment ". We have set up to be a Society of people studying and practising Religious Drama. Some of us have even " commenced author ".

What qualifications can we claim for doing this ? What specific contributions can we offer ? Granted that a few of us have had Religious Drama thrust upon us, most of us were born that way inclined : our first qualification is that we have an interest in the subject. Yes. But how much interest ? Enough to have read all round it ? Enough to know the great religious plays (I mean, as adults " know " plays, not for School Cert. fifteen years ago) ? Enough to practise in stage technique as hard as we used to at tennis or at typewriting ? Enough to take tube or bus or bike on a winter evening after work to cheer someone who is trying out a new play ? Enough to pay a double subscription to R.D.S. ?—all right, I'll go quiet.

No, I won't though. For we have had the nerve to approach the chief of " those truths which are of importance to the happiness of mankind ", and to do so through the medium of perhaps the most deeply human of all the arts ; we are daring to present the Truths of the Christian Faith. How can we hope to have any success if our technique is half-baked, our theology raw, our interpretation sloppy and a sugary icing of complacency is spread thick over the horrible dish ?

This is not a plea that we should all produce full-scale Cathedral Dramas. But it is a demand that the simplest half-hour performance —a children's mime of the Nativity, a Women's Institute reading— must be done with thought as well as with good intentions, with practise as well as with prayer.

KELBROOK LIBRARY PACIFIC SCHOOL

Of course it takes time : and so does queueing, and patching the armchair cover, and getting the garden dug, not to mention the daily spot of bother connected with P.A.Y.E.

" There is indeed some tenderness due " on this account to all of us. But if we think this thing important we have got to give time to it. Agreeing, therefore (no one who doesn't will have read so far) that we need to qualify ourselves better, what particular lines can we pursue to enable the Society to give us more help in so qualifying ? *What we can do to profit the Society* is what we should be considering. For there is nothing to prevent us from having an interest in Religious Drama quite apart from the R.D.S. ; but our membership of the Society brings us out " beyond the lists ".

Here are some suggestions, several of which were made at the Annual General Meeting.

First is the need for more money. It is obvious that if the work continues to grow at its present rate—still more if exciting possibilities envisaged by our Executive (from a small Summer School on an island to a great Training Centre in London) are ever to be realized —we shall need much more money, and some more staff, for we cannot go on piling additional burdens on to the shoulders of our present officers, who are already working too hard for too little. We appreciate immensely the voluntary help given by our theological advisers, our panel of experts, and our Executive Committee. But the plans of the Executive are doomed to frustration unless we have the means and the man-power to implement them. And the more members we get the more work there is to do and the less likely it is that the work will pay for itself, for—in this we differ from most Societies—our member-groups are poor ; they join to *get* help; how much can they *give* ? Could they perhaps give a percentage of the takings on each performance, or a small personal subscription in addition to the membership fee, so that big groups would contribute more to the common funds than small groups do ? Further, if a group joins in order to get specific advice on one occasion, should it not think at least twice before allowing its subscription to lapse thereafter ? As a national body we exert an influence on the development of Religious Drama which cannot be measured by the assistance claimed or given in return for any one subscription. There is a great deal of general work going on from which we all benefit, directly or indirectly, and it is this work which we should be willing to support.

Secondly there is propaganda, dire word for an essential service. Members must talk about R.D.S. wherever people are doing Religious Drama, for there is a steady testimony to the fact that all over the country groups are producing plays less well than they could, and are thankful to hear of R.D.S. *if any one tells them.* Arrange to put the Society's magazine and leaflets on your church and chapel bookstalls, send them to absent friends, leave them where they'll get read, take as much trouble as you would for a political meeting.

Thirdly, when you are yourself involved in doing a play, consult R.D.S. about it in good time. Use your Society to help make the play an offering that at least won't betray its own "ignorance and dullness". Don't be content with doing as well as last year, or as the next parish. It is impossible to raise the standard of religious plays by talking; the only way is to *do*: and then do better.

Lastly, if you are gifted so, you can try, by full and devoted technical practise (writing a farce, writing a pantomine, writing a who-dun-it, anything to learn the craft), by a serious study of the theological principles involved, by a search for fresh modes of presentation—and by a willingness to have your efforts torn in pieces by the experts—you can try to write one good play suitable for R.D.S. groups to act. It is almost impossible to do this alone. Writers need the help of theologians of all denominations; theologians should welcome the insights of poets, and the technical knowledge of theatre people, in the struggle to embody Truths "of importance to the happiness of mankind"; and they all depend upon the receiving mind of an audience sufficiently well informed and sufficiently sincere to preserve the integrity of its taste and judgment. Co-operation here is invaluable both for improvement and for encouragement.

Why should we bother? Because Religious Drama is a fact already in this country. Several thousand groups of people all over the Islands are doing Religious Plays—good, bad and appalling. The last two categories bring the Faith itself into derision. It is bad for the faithful to accept low standards of work anywhere and in this matter you can't blame the ungodly if they shoot out the lip, shake the head and go to watch football. The good productions of good plays are achieved at a sacrificial cost because there 's so little help available to their producers; and yet they are what we, as a Society, exist to succour.

The R.D.S. stands or falls by its ability and fitness to give this help in prayer, in thought, in time and in money. The honour to which we aspire is to be a truly interdenominational meeting ground for a work which brings the truth of the Incarnation home to men's business and bosoms; if we fail we "hazard disgrace" not for ourselves but for the cause we set out to serve. It is work for people not afraid of hard going "to be a kind of general challenger whom everyone has a right to attack".

C'MON, THEN

Religious Drama language causes some of us pain. We offer publication to any Limerick written in genuine Biblicalese with the pen of personal suffering. To give you the idea:—

A Biblical-Drama-struck youth
Proposed to his girl-friend, "O Ruth,
Doth like it thee so as
I be as thy Boaz?"
She quoth, "Haply, perchance, nay in sooth."

HYAENA AND BONE

By Nevill Coghill

The nature of drama is an impersonation for the sake of embodying an imaginative experience; the nursery game of " Let's pretend that you're a bone, and I'm a hungry hyaena " is a little play for two actors (one silent), and no audience. Like every other work of art, it has its conventions (i.e. pretences accepted by the participants), and it is done for fun (enjoyment, immediate pleasure). It is also a spiritual exercise (whether this is consciously understood or not by the bone and hyaena) in that, by doing it, the actors become aware of the feelings proper to the situation imagined. For the images they have chosen from nature have the power to concentrate and release vague intuitions into defined experiences. They learn a truth by a pretence; the truth they learn is the quality of fear, famine, and the forest, and the savage thrill of pouncing on a prey. In this, again, it is like all other works of art; it is concerned with the quality of real things mediated through things imagined. Young Shakespeare put the basis of this aesthetic philosophy (to me sufficient) thus :

> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
> And, as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation, and a name.

A religious play is therefore one which mainly embodies the qualities of religious experience and gives a local habitation to our intuitions of the holy.

I say " mainly embodies "; I could perhaps have said " exclusively embodies ". But this would perhaps have suggested that experience of the holy can be separated from other experience, that " otherness " is extricable from " thisness ". I do not feel sure that such a thing is possible; in the best examples (the parables of Christ, the *Divine Comedy*, the *Oresteia*, etc.) " otherness " is deliberately plunged into " thisness " and so appears to be the more itself. It is, however, possible to extricate " thisness " from " otherness ", as in *The Way of the World*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and so forth.

Two thousand years of Christian meditation have made reasonably clear what is to be deemed holy, what unholy, and what neither holy nor unholy; it has provided also what might be called a history of the holy and unholy, beginning with the Word, and passing into Time with the Creation, the Fall of the Angels, the Fall of Man, the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Resurrection, and (prophetically) the Day of Judgment. Thereafter it withdraws once more from Time, and therefore from drama. Similarly an intellectual or philosophic structure has been worked out in casuistry and theology. The purpose of this entire meditation is that we may learn to know God and to enjoy Him for ever. It is centred in the assertion that God exists and that we have and are part in His purposes. " Thisness " and " otherness " are in

perpetual relation and the qualities of that relation are the qualities of Christian holiness.

Now a work of art, as Professor Collingwood has shown, differs from a work of religion in that no work of art asserts anything. Like the little nursery play I have instanced, every work of art has its conventions, and begins with the words " Let's pretend "; it is an imagination. A work of religion, however, asserts a whole system as true. To the faithful there is no pretence about it.

I do not know if it is necessary for an artist to believe what he is pretending. Whether the countless painters of Crucifixions and Holy Families were among the faithful or not is hard to say; and it is still harder to say that those pictures that affect us most deeply with Christian experience must (on that account) have been the work of believers. To believe a thing does not give one the power to imagine it in terms of a work of art, nor does the power to imagine a thing force him who imagines it to believe it. Still, belief can be, and I suppose has often been, a help to the artists of Christianity, and I think it might be argued that belief has a quality of its own that is necessary to an understanding of the holy; but perhaps an artist can imagine that quality, without having the thing, as convincingly as he can imagine a unicorn.

An actor once told me that an actor's art consisted in being able, at will, to reproduce the effects of an emotion or passion he had once experienced; whether this is the whole story or not, it may well be that an artist who had lost his faith might still be able to create a Christian work of art that had the quality of faith simply by remembering, and then imagining, it (in so far as the two processes, deeply interwoven, can be distinguished).

Christian art, therefore, if it can be apprehended in the same sort of ways as it can be created, may convey the quality of a Christian experience, including the experience of what it feels like to believe, even to an unbeliever; and that, in so far as it is art, is its total purpose. But in so far as it is Christian, that is, religious, it must go beyond an expression of quality and seek to convert the beholder; there is no peace for a church militant. Indeed the Church would hold that merely to taste the qualities of God was otiose, if not blasphemous, and that it was better in any case to believe without emotional experiences than to luxuriate in them and have no faith.

A Christian play, therefore, resembles a socialist or other politically governed play; it is *parti pris*, and committed to propaganda. It is a weapon of conversion, and makes an assault on the will. In other words, it is something more than, and in a sense something hostile to, a work of art. This may be the reason why there are so few good ones.

I wonder what an ancient Greek audience felt after a performance of *Oedipus*? To a modern eye it gives a holy and horrifying picture of the human predicament; one could neither avoid nor be exonerated from guilt. There was nothing one could do. But after seeing *Everyman* a Christian might well feel there was a great deal he could do; nay, worse, he ought to do, must do. But there was a hope and a promise beyond it. *Everyman*, perhaps the greatest Christian play in English,

is *parti pris*. It is direct propaganda, and is to a large degree only enjoyed (or tolerated) by non-Christians because they feel it is quaintly mediaeval. They would revolt from such a play in modern terms. The outcry, for instance, against the libretto of *The Rape of Lucrece* by Mr. Duncan was manifestly based on a horror of Christian propaganda. What had been looked forward to as a musical treatment of rape and suicide turned out (God save us!) to be little better than a sermon. Now that is exactly what it ought to have been. A more senseless and disgusting story than that of Lucrece is hard to imagine, and it was suddenly put in its proper perspective by the introduction of a Christian commentary by the chorus.

If the claims of Christianity are true, then the qualities it champions are always relevant, as much to Lucrece as to ourselves. Those who promote Christian drama are too often undecided, not to say mealy-mouthed, as to what they are trying to do. They are anxious to convert, but afraid of antagonizing. But a church militant has, and is bound to make, antagonists. A compromise is usually reached. An inoffensive nativity play is got up, in quasi-mediaeval, quasi-oriental costume, and in this atmosphere of fairy-tale and fancy-dress the birth of God is tactfully presented.

If Christianity is to take part in the present renaissance of drama, it will do well to avoid for its subjects scenes from the life of Christ, the Bible and mediaeval Saints. I do not say that some genius could not pull it off, but that what is immediately and Christianly wanted are plays that cannot be mistaken for a pious charade about something that happened a great while ago, still less for something " charmingly mediaeval ". The kind of subject that seems to me most hopeful is one in which the qualities produced by the Christian life are seen in clear conflict and antagonism with those of other world orders, dollar-worship or communism, for instance, and the superiority of those qualities demonstrated and asserted.

I doubt if modern plays on the mediaeval principle of retelling the Bible story would now be effective. People who go to theatres are for the most part educated and know the story already; moreover the Lord Chamberlain (if I am not mistaken) forbids the presentation of the person of God on the stage. A film of the life of Christ, simply and sensitively done, without garish haloes or other vulgarities of stunt and sentiment, might do the same work that mediaeval drama attempted . . . the work of teaching the history of the holy to the great mass of people. Such is the force of a film on most film-goers, because of what they feel to be the " reality " of a photograph (perhaps I should have written " actuality "), that understanding and conviction are more readily assimilated in a cinema than from a stage-play. This is not what I feel myself, but I believe I am an exception. Stage-illusion is stronger upon me than movie-illusion.

What would, however, be effective on the stage, and upon the minds of theatre-goers (as opposed to film-goers, in so far as they can be distinguished), would be plays based on almost any story *except* the Bible story, whether ancient or modern (Lucrece or Thomas à Becket are recent examples, and *This Way to the Tomb*), which mix " thisness "

with " otherness " and show the Christian qualities fighting, in a natural world, for supernatural standards. A play showing these standards in defeat, or what the world calls defeat, might be the most moving of all.

What in my opinion, should be most avoided are the pretty-pretty playlets like animated Christmas cribs that are so often got up for performance in churches in a quasi-mediaeval style. From these I except Mr. Clay's Chelsea Nativity Pageant, because I think it a work of art, a thing of important beauty. But I take respectful leave to doubt its value as an instrument of conversion. It has been possible to write effective propaganda that is also great poetry, nobly dramatic. And it should be possible still; we must wait upon genius.

But a maximum of ineffectiveness combined with badness is to be seen in the pseudo-mediaeval sentimentalities I spoke of; they may start a tear or two, but they tell us nothing of the qualities of holiness as Christian vision sees them. Nor do they impel us imaginatively to live a Christian thought out in actuality. " Otherness " is carefully padded off and rendered innocuous. Such plays are less Christian than ecclesiastical; like the architecture of churches since the Gothic revival, they are in fancy-dress, as if no one but God could live in such a house! But if God does not live in many mansions, Christianity has nothing to tell us of holiness.

A simple fact shows the weakness of this kind of " religious drama ". It never includes a laugh, for it is not respectable to laugh in church, where it is generally performed. Respectability is the enemy of holiness and, for the most part, has conquered it. The mediaeval drama obtained its greatest effects by the immediate and raucous juxtaposition of the sublime and the ridiculous; but this, in our mediaevalizing, has been respectably toned down, toned out. What clergyman would permit the *Secunda Pastorum* of the Wakefield Cycle to be performed in his church? A stolen sheep, masquerading as a baby in a cradle, and Mak tossed in a blanket next door to the Lamb of God in an ox-stall, with angels shouting *Gloria in excelsis*? What next, I wonder! Better pretend that we're all bones and that there is no hungry hyaena.

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LEAST LOVED LINES

(Culled from Religious Drama)

Hither, lad, yon goblet, that I quaff!
(Tr. Here, boy, give me a drink out of that mug.)
O all ye who delve in the bowels of the earth!
(Tr. O Miners!)
Hie hence nor return hitherward.
(Tr. Go away and don't come back.)
Maids, maidens, damosels, hearken unto me!
(Tr. Girls, listen!)
Nor not impossible I deem may be
A swift determination he achieve.
(Tr. I think he may soon decide.)

BEGINNERS, PLEASE

A few practical suggestions for the inexperienced

By M. Rivers

DETAIL

Small details in costume may make or mar the effect of a production. Watch the hem-lines: don't let them dip, and see that long skirts have adequate petticoats to set them out. Uncouponed linen scrim will do and a six-inch stiffening of book muslin run inside a light-weight skirt hem will double its "costly appearance". Watch sleeve-lengths; hired or borrowed clothes often look absurd because the sleeves are the wrong length: Watch the intrusions. If anything looks worse than a wrist-watch on the arm of Herodias' daughter, it is a "confirmation cross" round the neck of Rachel. Watch for verisimilitude. Full pitchers are heavy. Fires smoke. The look precedes the words in "I see someone coming!" A trampling of boots without should not herald the approach of the barefoot messenger. Finally, clean-shaven or bearded? Make up your mind, for blue pencil looks like blue pencil.

STUFF

No black velvet obtainable for curtains. And a good thing too; black mops up light. Use hessian. Stitch with a three-inch hem at bottom, and send it to the laundry to be professionally laundered: it will come back more supple and with a slight sheen on it. Run a thin snake-like sandbag (made of any close woven bits of stuff machined to a width of two inches) through the hem, to weight the curtain. Hang with plenty of rings or hooks. The weighted hem will withstand quite a strong draught, so that your curtains will not billow out when the backstage door opens. Stencilled patterns applied with distemper will give a tapestried effect. A splendidly rich appearance can be obtained in mediaeval scenes by the use of costumes made of canvas. Paint one side with a brilliant dark dye—blue, green, purple—the other with a pale contrasting shade—pink, lemon, sky-blue—wing sleeves left loose and open will appear to be made of stiff corded silk lined with dull satin. It does not fray and therefore needs no hemming.

AND NONSENSE

"If only they could *speak* better!" They can. Make them. How? By practising. What? *Not* the words they are going to use in their parts. But noises with similar rhythms.

For example. "*Never*! I would rather *Die* than abjure! *Torture* will not wring *Denial* from me!" These sentences can be effective or comic entirely according to their delivery. The nervous amateur is almost sure to fight shy of such an outburst. But success can be accomplished thus.

"The important words are Never, Die, Torture and Denial. It goes like this. 'Wallop! Plinkaplonka Wham titti bong! Boopa boo pom woo Titoota plonka.' Now *you* try."

The producer can, of course, easily reduce an actress (or actor) to tears by going over and over the real words and getting further and further from the effect desired. But the introduction of Nonsense words, and the laughter that usually accompanies them not only rams home the rhythm of the sentence but releases the nervous tension so that the speaker can start afresh. Similarly, when a scene has grown dulled and lifeless, a silent run through, where no word is spoken but the whole scene is mimed, is of immense help.

LIGHT

Avoid amber like a plague. It kills colour values. The warm glow you want can be much better obtained by the use of pink, pale or deep. Be determined to have light where you need it. Use ordinary bedside lamps, big electric torches, any (safe) contrivance, but get variety with your lighting. Rehearse the lights specially. The professional theatre always has a separate lighting plot and separate rehearsals, and so should amateurs.

DARK

Don't feel you can't do a play because you've no front curtains. Choose a one-act play and start and finish with a black-out.

Here is a considered appraisal of a Nativity play which has held audiences for twenty-five years. We should welcome readers' views on the subject.

"LEST ONE GOOD CUSTOM"

By Terence Vale

The Joyous Pageant of the Holy Nativity was presented by the Graham Street Players during last Advent for the twenty-fifth time; it was again directed by Mr. Charles Claye, the author also of the text, who merits fully the esteem of all who are interested in religious drama, both for his pioneer efforts and for his quiet persistence through all these years. To bring any dramatic work to its silver jubilee is no small achievement, and if *Charley's Aunt* or *Peter Pan* received in their day the acclamation of majority attained, the attainment of this by an overtly religious piece surely demands no less celebration by all who are concerned for religious drama. To author and producer, players and stage management, singers, musicians and by no means least to Mr. Antony Bernard, we offer our respectful homage of felicitation upon the honourable place which they have achieved in the annals of religious drama, and upon the general recognition and royal approbation which their sustained efforts have won.

A quarter-century is, however, a time both for congratulation and for stocktaking: and it is interesting and instructive to compare the impressions left by the Pageant to-day with those made ten, fifteen, or twenty years ago. Then it took one's breath away by its loveliness—

yes, and by its relative novelty. Never before had we seen the story of God's-becoming-man told with such exquisite beauty of colour, form, movement and sound. The Pageant was indeed a work of art, (as Mr. Coghill calls it) " a thing of important beauty." Is it so still? Yes, and no. It is still beautiful: but is the beauty important? What, precisely, does it import?

A programme note told us that there were two ways of presenting the story of our Lord's Nativity—as a temporal event, or as an eternal fact. The first way, said the note, would be to dress the characters in the costumes of the first-century Palestine: the second, to present it in the timeless style of mediaeval Italian painting. Now here is a great fallacy. On what grounds is the style of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italy held to be more " timeless ", more capable of presenting " eternal fact ", than first-century Palestine? Fashions change, and have in fact changed radically in the last ten to fifteen years. The " humanist " styles of the late Middle Ages and High Renaissance, which seemed to our fathers the pinnacle of human art beyond all question, are to us now distasteful, and out of sympathy. The shift of mood was noticed and commented on even before 1914 by T. E. Hulme: the new significance of Oriental styles, and more especially the revived " importance " of Byzantine art, which he then remarked, has now become fairly general. In this our revived interest in and study of liturgical development has played a large part: it has taught us the value and importance of stylization—of the expression of " eternal fact " through the minimum of agreed conventions, not the maximum of personal variety—through the greatest economy of line and movement, not the most lavish or florid flamboyance. It has taught us also that a really " timeless " mode of expression can be only one which is new—never one which historically has been, and that this in its turn will become " time-ful " as soon as it is accepted, and thus useless to convey " eternal fact "; so that the nearest approximation is that which is most stylized, conventionalized, abstract, and thus patient of implementation by succeeding generations. If we look to Italy at all, then, it is to the mosaics in San Apollinare, not to the canvases in the Uffizi, that we now look, for the supreme expression of European art: and in that measure, a production in quattrocento styles seems to us as remote, as faded . . . almost as funny . . . as a production of Crummles or Macready.

This is an aesthetic criticism. But what of the Pageant as " an instrument of conversion " (Mr. Coghill's phrase, again)? A religious judgment must, of course, stand upon other grounds than an aesthetic one: yet it cannot be wholly separate. Phoney art cannot but make religion a bit phoney too: and the Pageant this year left more than one observer with an uncomfortable sense that, if this was Catholicism, then Catholicism was somehow wrong. Was this really how God takes on human nature, and redeems, and glorifies it? Was this really God active in history? It was all very beautiful: but it was all very precious, . . . almost *in*human. If this did indeed convert people in their hundreds, *to what did it convert them*? Was it to the true and living God?

Or was it, perhaps, merely to " religion " ? God Himself through the prophets of old had a good deal to say about that.

To us, however, the most urgent question is " What of the Pageant as drama ? " True, religious drama has its own canons, and must not be judged unfairly by others: and so rapid has been the development of serious religious drama in our own day, that many of these canons have come to be recognized and accepted since the Pageant was first performed. Ay, but there's the rub. The Pageant was performed first in 1922; *The Rock* was not written or performed till 1934, and it is from then that the revival of serious Christian drama is most conveniently dated. The great series of Canterbury plays—*Murder in the Cathedral*, *Zeal of Thine House*, *Thomas Cranmer*, *Devil to Pay*—and the work of younger but not less serious dramatists such as Ronald Duncan, Christopher Fry, Norman Nicholson and Anne Ridler (without prejudice to other reputable names)—has substantially altered the whole scene. Can the Christian Church, militant here in earth, afford to sit back and rest on its laurels ? Can it afford to put on what to unbelievers must seem " pious charades about something that happened a great while ago ", and what to the faithful may so easily be an easy indulgence in the feeling that " Perfection is here. The Church is safe. The sword can be sheathed " ? Surely we must answer, No; and still less can the Church afford to present the story of the Incarnation as something " charmingly mediaeval " . . . above all, in a London theatre, beneath the full glare of publicity.

No. The Pageant was an enterprise of heroic adventure twenty-five years ago: it has grown through the years to its present rank of honour. But now a new tradition is growing—more vigorous, more serious, more (dare we say ?) authentic. Is it not time for the Joyous Pageant to retire to the pages of history, there enshrined for ever in praise, rather than to prostitute the story of our redemption—the only hope of salvation in a world grappling with the awful facts of destruction, despair and death—to a " pretty-pretty playlet like an animated Crib " ? Let us hope that we may salute Mr. Claye, with his company, with both " Salvete " and " Valete ".

NEWS OF THE OTHERS

STAR TURNS

Watermoor Players.

We reproduce here a local review of Charles Williams' play, " Seed of Adam ", produced by the Watermoor Players at Christmas.

" . . . In many ways this play must, I think, be the most challenging affair this devoted and daring company has yet attempted. It is called the *Seed of Adam*, and though built upon two traditional stories of the Holy Scriptures—the story of Adam and Eve and the story of Christ's birth in Bethlehem—the two are so intertwined, so counterpointed one upon another like a double melody that nothing so familiar and accepted as tradition describes it. It is all new, startling

and haunting. As the author, Charles Williams, says in his synopsis to the play, which is printed on the programme:—

> " ' This Nativity is not so much a presentation of the historical facts as of their spiritual value. The persons of the play, besides being dramatic characters, stand for some capacity or activity of man.'

" Who are these persons ? Well, there is the Tsar of Caucasia in his gold robes and astrachan hat and his orange, red and yellow clad followers. He stands for pride of material power and offers mankind the solace of wealth and pleasure. Counterposing him is the Sultan of Bagdad attired in flowing cloak and high hat of scholarly black. He offers his followers in their Eastern garments of purple, grey, blue and silver the solace of things of the mind—music, the arts and philosophy. Between the two parties stands Adam, strong, stalwart—a veritable ' first man ' among these decadent children of his. He chides them passionately to get back to Paradise, the only true good, the only true solace. In vain. They do not care. And who can find the way ?

" There is no room to go into the detail of plot which links this crisis with the next, which is the conflict between Mary on the eve of the birth of the Holy Child and a cannibal negress called ' Mother Myrrh ', as her reptilian negro son, the Third King, is called ' King of Myrrh ' —the lord of bitterness. These two represent Hell and Death, all evil and men's hopeless realization of their bitter fate as outlaws from Paradise. As Mary (the youngest and best of Adam's children) skirmishes with the greedy black figure, the Archangel appears glorious in his glittering raiment. With that Mary is fulfilled with power and the negress falls at her feet. The Angel speaks two deep words in Hebrew. I think they are ' Adonai elohim ' (' Praise to the Lord '). ' The King of Myrrh ', in the presence of the Kings of Gold and Frankincense and their followers, Joseph and the two Roman soldiers who are attending Adam now in the guise of Augustus Caesar, and Eve, hears the words and falls to his knees knowing his heavenly adversary Gabriel, the Lord's messenger, and realizing utter defeat. Man is saved in spite of himself, and the King of Myrrh leads the other two Kings and the whole company as they go off stage to the stable where the Babe is being born. They go, all of them, to do worship and pay tribute, to admit the triumph of the Highest and the reversal of the sentence of the Fall.

" That is as near as I can get to a brief account of a play as tensely dramatic as it is richly coloured, as musical in the strong beats and rhythms of its poetry—most admirably spoken by the whole company —as it is wrapt in a radiant vision of what in fact is the meaning of redemption and Divine Mercy. Whether that meaning in the poet's mystical and symbolic version of it, unfolds itself as much to reason as it does to feeling, may be wondered. There was no doubt that it had unfolded itself gloriously to the company, who had, of course, this advantage over the audience, that they had studied the words over and over and, as words turn into thoughts, Charles Williams's lovely words have become the company's thoughts, so that they almost literally

shared his vision. That was plain, not only from the magnificent performances given by the outstanding characters—Adam, the King of Myrrh, the Archangel and Mary who seemed to convey a sort of joyous untouched innocence that was unforgettable—but from the discipline and enthusiasm which distinguished the minor characters and the choruses. The Watermoor Players should congratulate themselves on a difficult but successful experiment most worthily and sincerely carried out."

VEGA.

Deanery Players, Tavistock.

And this, from the "Tavistock Gazette".

"About a year ago, the Company of Deanery Players (Tavistock) began to journey throughout the Deanery and beyond with an original play, *Then Will She Return*. In six months they gave a total of thirty-six performances in seventeen of the twenty-two parishes in the Deanery, travelling about 850 miles to do so. Some 4,600 people saw the play—a strikingly devotional offering—and £365 was handed over to the Devon Churches Thanksgiving Fund.

"On Wednesday, the Company gave the first performance, at Tavistock Town Hall, of a new play by the same authoress and under direction of the same producer—*Give Place to the Physician*—and this surpasses even the previous offering in its lofty conception and reverent yet vital presentation.

"The physician in the play is Luke, of the New Testament, and the story is of his conversion. It is unfolded in modern language and idiom which give an arresting quality of verisimilitude, and against which the occasional Scriptural quotation stands out in all the stark simplicity of truth.

"Luke the doctor has the high ethical standards of his calling, even in the days of his disdain of Christianity, and for long there is a conflict in his mind between medicine and miracle.

"The manifest sincerity of the play has all the aids—and they are considerable—of skilled and painstaking production. It is a long time since we have seen such effective use made of costume, sets, grouping, and lighting. The Eastern garb has been given, with wise forethought, a background of cheerful but neutral colour, depending on form rather than hue for its purpose. At one time there are nine characters on the stage, but there is not a moment when they mask each other nor vitiate the power of the picture. At almost any moment in the play the action could be halted to hold a tableau of beauty and appeal.

"Lighting plays a more than usually important part in establishing and varying the atmosphere from the sombre to the glad.

"There is, right at the beginning, the contriving of dawn—the growing light on the Mount of Olives, where the Apostles John and Peter await the coming of Philip the Deacon, Luke, and his defiant young neophyte Onesimus on the Day of Pentecost. A tension in the air in days when it was not always healthy to be known as a Christian.

" From this almost brooding opening into contrast of the second scene, of domesticity; moving in its simplicity, with Mary the Mother of Jesus and the wives of Mark and of Peter in conversation. Into this peace, the irruption of Philip with his dramatic news of the wonders of Pentecost. An enthusiasm which seems to reflect the spirit of that new day and charge the atmosphere with significance. And, in it, Luke still holding back distrustfully from a state of thought at variance with his training. Departing with some impatience. But—" Good-bye, Luke, I shall see you again," says Mary, quietly prophetic.

" Second act opens with galling realization by Luke that his master and patient, Philemon, has been healed by (to use the old man's words) ' a power that hews mountains in pieces and yet protects the wren's egg '.

" Luke facing a bleak future in which the day of the miracle seems to bring to naught all his medical training, but uplifted when Mary shows him that healing hands of the doctor still have their purpose, and going on to put right the dislocated shoulder of a girl.

" And Luke finds his other vocation, that of a writer, when called upon by Mary to set down the story of ' the birth of my Son '.

" Most impressive scene of all follows. Curtain rises on the gloom-shrouded city walls and the huddled corpse of the stoned Stephen, first of the martyrs. The sad gathering by lantern light of other Apostles, recalling the sadistic hatred of Saul. Their commissioning by Peter to carry on their great task far and wide.

" The third act, pre-supposing a lapse of seventeen years, brings together Luke and that Saul of Tarsus who has become Paul the Apostle. Paul seeking the services of a physician, but Luke finding the answer to his problems of heart and mind.

" Finally, three years later in Rome, Paul sending out the Christian messengers and, in the words of the title, giving place to the physician—pointing out that the three answers to prayer in sickness are healing by medicine, healing by miracle, or enduring martyrdom.

" Minor roles are handled well.

" Throughout, the play has unity and a cumulative effect which builds up to the inspiring climax. We commend it to readers. It is not thoughtless entertainment, because of its deeper implications and message. But it has beauty, colour, depth, and a satisfying quality."

Both these articles show that a standard has been reached by the players and producers of the plays in question, which has evoked from the critic a response quite different from that customary in such reviews.

From Far Away.

Excerpts from two letters that seem to us cheering:—

DUBLIN Religious Drama Group. . . . We have now completed our first week's tour, and are launching out on the second round—a little farther afield. We have been very pleased at the response, and do feel that we are being successful (in the right sense of the word, as you put it), as wherever we go we have had the remark made : " It is all done so reverently "; " There is such a nice atmosphere " and that

seems to be the general feeling even from those who do not agree with " Religious Drama ". I, myself, have been most agreeably surprised at the real spirit of self-sacrifice that has been shown by the performers, in turning up for rehearsals, making their way to ungetatable places, and putting up with all sorts of inconveniences in the way of staging, dressing-rooms, etc., without a grumble, which is something I have never yet found in ordinary " Dramatics ". There has been a wonderful feeling of helpful co-operation throughout. DOROTHY MILLER.

GENEVA. I thought you might like to hear something about the youth course on drama which I visited here in Switzerland.

The term which they use, *Laienspiel*, is a religious play (originally a morality) acted by lay people. They make a good deal of the distinction between this and what they call " Theater ", which might, I suppose, be translated " theatricals ". The course, of which I was only able to attend the first three days of the week, was an experiment put on by two young and enthusiastic pastors of the Swiss National Church. It was attended by about twenty people mostly between eighteen and twenty-five years of age, members of " player " groups in their own churches, and about four interested pastors. It was held at Frauenfeld, near Lake Constance, in a modern " parish house " where a small stage was fitted up in the lecture hall.

The plays were *The Woman of Samaria*—a dramatization in terms of village life in any age and country of John 4, with a cast of women—and a play about the call of Francis of Assisi. Parts had been allotted and learnt before the course and the plays were to be produced to a parish audience on the last night of the course.

The Swiss Church is Reformed and has long emphasized preaching to the exclusion of almost everything else except, perhaps, singing. " Going to church " is still referred to as " going to the sermon ". This " Laienspiel " course was a sign of something more that a desire to act plays : it represents a desire on the part of the layman to be " active " and to find new forms of worship and of the expression of Christian faith. Other signs were to be seen in the short and beautiful liturgical service in church which began the day (at 7.30 a.m.) and in the learning of new hymns sung unaccompanied in four parts, canon or with descant—sometimes with violins taking the upper parts.

It was emphasized that the plays were as truly a proclamation of the Gospel as a sermon and therefore, if local prejudice did not prevail, should be acted in church in a setting of worship. Special point was made of the continuity between players and congregation—there should be no isolation of the players behind curtains and foot-lights: they should be, as it were, the mouthpiece of the congregation.

I gave a short talk on Religious Drama in England, based largely on Martin Browne's *Past, Present and Future*, and on Oliver Wilkinson's Iona Experiment, and told them about *The Man Born to be King*. The points they took up were:—

i. Drama as evangelism. They felt that the plays they had, while helpful to believers, were not such as to convince or even hold the attention of the unbeliever.

ii. The place of the artist in the Church—though they doubted if T. S. Eliots and D. L. Sayers' were to be found in any quantity in Switzerland (Britain has 43 million more people to draw on !).

iii. The importance of finding a new language conveying Christian truth to those not brought up on Christian terminology.

They feel themselves that they may be on the verge of something bigger than they realize and are ready for new ideas and experiments. I feel it is well worth while to keep in touch with this group. If you can keep me posted about Summer Schools, etc., in England, I should be glad to pass on information in case any of them with the requisite amount of English are able to attend.

With many thanks for your help,

Yours sincerely,

JEAN. M. FRASER,
Secretary, World Council of Churches.

EDINBURGH. The single performance given at the Gateway Theatre in Edinburgh last night of the Iona Theatre's Biblical play, *The Journey*, was unusually interesting, and at times very moving. It was quite unlike any ordinary amateur performance. There were one or two short passages—probably occupying only two or three minutes of the play's duration—when the speaking by untrained actors was so bad as to be quite unintelligible. And yet the players all " lived ", even the few who made no attempt to make their words clear, and who, in an ordinary amateur production, would probably have been taught to speak, and in concentrating on clear speech might have become wooden dummies.

There were all the shades of ability, but there was " feeling " throughout the play. The cast were unnamed; some were very good, and one cannot omit mention of the player who took the part of St. Paul who, in voice and gesture, gave a performance that proclaimed the actor without effort.

The play, as Mr. Oliver Wilkinson explained before the curtain went up, was created by a Bible Study Group in Community House, Glasgow, and was gradually written by various individuals in the Group, lines being improved or re-written after critical discussion by the Group. The action is based on the 16th Chapter of Acts, and in a series of scenes there is presented a dramatic and well-knit story with obvious applications to the present day, or any period in history. In its setting, excellent use was made of varying heights and of spotlights. The costumes, the grouping, and the handling of the crowd scenes showed a masterly sense of play production, and one felt at the end that it would be a good thing if, by some means, the play and the company could be seen in Edinburgh again, and for a series of performances.

(From *The Scotsman.*)

U.S.A. A letter from Diana Carroll:—

Seven weeks divided between five or six of the Eastern States of America does not entitle one to generalize on any one subject. Still less when that tour has not been confined to the study of a single aspect of American life, but has been more in the nature of a general introduction. These notes on religious drama in U.S.A. are, therefore, limited to such information as I was able to pick up at first or second-hand among a great deal of other matter, ranging from drama in Colleges, Clubs, on Broadway, to the prices of food, and problems of parking cars.

My visit was on behalf of the Y.W.C.A., primarily to exchange information on the scope and methods in presenting drama in the Associations in Britain and America. In addition I was to speak on some international aspects of the Y.W.C.A., and had asked that where possible I might see the work of amateur groups in colleges, or little theatres. The schedule included New York, Dayton, Cleveland and Warren (the last three in Ohio), Washington D.C., Boston and New Haven (Yale). My time was spent about equally between hospitality in private homes and in Y.W.C.A. " residences ". I met immense kindness, and readiness to show one things, and a desire to know " what things are really like in Britain ".

I had been prepared to find a great variety of sects and denominations in the American Churches. I had not been prepared for the very large congregations (Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, etc.), and the size and richness of their buildings. Beautifully equipped auditoriums, schoolrooms, and offices are frequently attached to the Church proper, often in one architectural unity. There is a very impressive social and family life in the churches, many of which have their own director of education, and some their own drama director. Two of the latter whom I met were Miss Gertrude Fagan of the Riverside Church, New York, and Edward Magnum of Mount Vernon Methodist Church, Washington. Miss Fagan has produced a wide variety of plays including *The Zeal of Thy House, Thunder Rock, Outward Bound, The Servant in the House* (Charles R. Kennedy), *Joan of Lorraine*, in addition to nativity plays and many one-acts.

She remembered vividly Martin Browne's production of *Murder in the Cathedral* and regretted that there was no equivalent to R.D.S. in America, and quickly acted on the suggestion that she should join R.D.S. as an overseas member. In Washington the Mount Vernon Players are part of the social and artistic programme of the Church, but do not often give religious plays. Their list includes many classics: *Cyrano, The Shoemaker's Holiday, The Duenna* as well as *Noah, Journey's End* and *Alice in Wonderland*. An interesting summer outdoor experiment was called *Shakespeare in Shirtsleeves*. The artistic success of the scheme over ten years seems to have spread beyond the bounds of the immediate congregation, since a pamphlet states " Protestants, Catholics and Jews work harmoniously together in inter-religious relationships probably not equalled by any other Church in America ". This, therefore, is not religious drama, but drama sponsored by a church.

Catholic University at Washington, D.C., has one of the best-known college drama departments in the States, under the full-time direction of Father Gilbert Hartke. Although their productions have included *Murder in the Cathedral* (with Robert Speaight as guest artist), *Dr. Faustus, The Tidings Brought to Mary* and *The Zeal of Thy House*, the department by no means confines itself to religious drama, nor need the students —whether actors, playwrights or technicians—necessarily belong to the Roman Catholic Church—though probably the majority in fact do. The accent of the department is on playwriting, including musical shows, but productions also include many classics. As in most of the college theatres, students study directing (production) and do the practical work of costumes and sets, as well as acting, some of them with a view to professional careers.

Murder in the Cathedral has been widely produced in the States, and *The Family Reunion* was being played in New York early in December, but I was unfortunately unable to see it. This title is easy to confuse with *Family Portrait*, a play which has obviously made a great appeal to many American audiences. In it, incidents in a Ministry of Christ are seen through the eyes of His Mother, brothers and sisters. It will be interesting to see what response this play meets with in London, where it is to be produced shortly. One of the critiques at the end of the printed copy is illuminating in this connection: " To deal effectively with so compelling a theme without offending the beliefs of different groups within Christian life and within Jewish life is a task of tremendous proportion. It seems to me that the task, however, was dealt with with the greatest ability and talent." Another says: " It was quite in line with the trend of modern religious thinking which subordinates the theological to the human element " (one cannot help querying: " What of the divine ? ").

The same element of humanism implicit in a culminating speech, to my mind, mars an otherwise most beautiful Christmas play, *A Child is Born*, by the poet Stephen Vincent Benet. Originally written for broadcasting, this play is easily adapted to stage performance and has been given by many groups. It is included in an anthology of modern religious plays, *A Treasury of Religious Drama*, edited by Thelma Brown, which appeared recently (Associated Press, $3).

The only opportunity of seeing religious drama in action came two days before I sailed for home, when I saw the dress rehearsal of a Nativity play by the Harlem branch of the Y.W.C.A. It remains vividly in my mind. The cast were girls and boys mostly with very little acting experience, all were negroes except a shepherd who was Porto Rican, and Gabriel, a King, and the prologue who were white. The producer was an Austrian woman, whose mother had played in the Salzburg *Everyman* under Reinhardt. The play was the old English Towneley Nativity. A tall gold triptych of painted beaverboard against a curtain surround, made a perfect background to the dark faces. Their natural dignity of movement and the way in which they spoke the mediaeval words was simple, but very moving.

There on that stage one saw in miniature the intricate pattern of race and tradition which is one of the fascinations of America, united to celebrate the birthday of Christ.

DIANA CARROLL, *Y.W.C.A. Drama Adviser.*

All the Rest.

Reading. *Murder in the Cathedral*, by T. S. Eliot, was presented by Reading Christian Council, in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Reading, November, 1947.

The Christian Council of Reading deserves high praise for sponsoring the presentation of this play as their first dramatic venture and for the efficiency and enthusiasm which carried it through to success.

Their choice of a great play, and its setting in the nave of a beautiful old church, must surely have set a standard for Religious Drama in the town which it will not be easy to follow.

The cast of amateurs, drawn from a wide area and various denominations, including Quakers, Free Church, Anglicans and Roman Catholics, was under the direction of a skilled producer. The acting was competent rather than exciting where the men were concerned; Becket himself was played with intelligence and directness, but insufficient power. It was left to the women to reach the higher levels of poetic appreciation and dramatic skill. The Latin chanting of a choir added considerably to the "heard melodies"; the speaking was so good that a packed audience was "held" throughout, though to many of them the action can have been only partly visible.

We hope that the Council will feel encouraged to sponsor more plays in the future and that similar bodies in other towns will follow Reading's example, which well demonstrated the effectiveness of religious drama as a vital Christian influence when it is handled with devotion and artistry.

(Report by CARINA ROBINS.)

Bickley and Widmore. Extracts from *The Bromley and District Times* report:—"Although Nativity plays must inevitably resemble each other to some extent, those presented by the Bickley and Widmore Guild of Players in the past twenty years have shown that the same themes may be treated in so many different ways that repetition need not dull their appeal. . . .

"*Saviour of Mankind* depends for its appeal more on beauty of words, music and pictorial effect than on the exploitation of dramatic situations. . . .

"The presentation of the play, which achieved real beauty, reflected high credit on producer, players, musicians and stage staff, who, as usual, remain anonymous."

Northumberland. Two Conferences on Religious Drama have been held recently in Northumberland, the chief speaker at both being Miss Freda Collins.

The first was held at Bedlington, on November 1st, the occasion being the Annual Conference of the Northumberland Branch of the Institute of Christian Education, when Miss Collins spoke on the value of religious drama, the production of plays, and how to make spontaneous drama in the classroom educational.

On the second occasion a week-end Course in Religious Knowledge was arranged by the County Education Authority at Berwick-upon-Tweed on November 7th and 8th, Miss Collins occupying half of the time on the subject of Religious Drama, and using a group of thirty children aged eight to eleven from the Spittal School, Berwick, in order to demonstrate the principles she was advocating.

The lectures proved extremely helpful, not only because of the clear exposition of fundamentals by Miss Collins, but because of the practical illustrations given either by use of volunteers from the audience, or by means of the group of children from whom Miss Collins succeeded in getting an excellent response in spite of their natural reserve.

Correspondent, A. E. WHITE.

Hove. The Scouts and Guides of St. Leonard's Church, Aldrington, performed the Nativity play, *Beginning of the Way*, in the church with very happy results. The play was produced in serial form, one scene being taken on each of the first three

Wednesdays in Advent as part of the Advent evening service; suitable music, readings and prayers preceded and followed the performances, which were staged quite simply on the chancel steps, with a curtained background and a minimum of furniture. This, the young people's first effort at performing in church, was most commendable and encouraging. They are now considering a play for Easter.

Correspondent, C. J. Cole.

Birmingham. An enterprising and interesting production of *Skipper Next to God* was given by students of Queen's College, Edgbaston, early in December. This English translation of the Dutch play by Jan von Hartog had a short run in London some time ago, with the author in the title role.

The play itself has a phantasmal quality reminiscent of the *Flying Dutchman*. Yet it has a great many possibilities mainly on account of its topical note. It deals with Jewish refugees stranded on a Dutch ship because no country will allow them to land. Press reports regarding "illegal immigrants" at the present time are liable to be overshadowed by headlines on the Economic Crisis or International Conferences so that a play which stirs our consciences, or gives us a new slant on the Jewish problem is not to be disregarded.

These possibilities were fully realized by the producer, Michael Hewlett, and he was ably supported by fourteen of his fellow-students. It is no mean achievement to give a nautical atmosphere to a lecture-room, but the result in this case was most effective. There was some fine acting particularly from Stewart Allin as the Skipper in a part that was somewhat lacking in integrity. We wonder if Kuiper's religious fervour was not in some measure due to hero-worship of his dead father. Maurice Cuttell gave a life-like portrait of the First Engineer and David Maloney (fourteen years) thoroughly enjoyed himself as Henky, the messroom boy. There was one fine moment when, terrified by the darkness and noise during an attack, he kneels down and tries to recall all the prayers he has ever learnt.

This presentation carried a conviction which came from the players themselves, and not from the play. That a production such as this is finding its place in the annual activities of college life, is highly creditable and calls for encouragement.

Sheffield. *The Old Man of the Mountains* is the story of Elijah and the Widow's Son with a present-day setting in Cumberland. The poetry throughout speaks of dales, lakes and stony crags. The Beck choruses are particularly delightful. There is the sound of rippling water after the rain, slowing down during the drought to staccato drips and drops.

Simplicity might be termed the keynote of Miss Pamela Keily's production at Sheffield. The setting was divided to show a cottage interior on the left, and a garden on the right—an aspect which is difficult to handle at the best of times. The cottage kitchen had a background of natural hessian, while beer-boxes covered with hessian and painted grey formed the garden boundaries.

The costumes, also made from hessian, were of the plain simple peasant type and provided the necessary colouring of blue, dark green and deep rich reds with touches of yellow and beige.

The acting was restrained and sincere and the production was a striking example of how much can be achieved with imagination and thought backed by care and attention to detail.

The conditions at Sheffield were no more perfect than for ordinary parish groups. All the usual obstacles cropped up—bad weather, illnesses, colds, no rehearsal room, etc. Happily they were all overcome, yet those of us who are still at the beginning of Christian Drama learnt many lessons from them. One is that we must bring with us, at the outset, an attitude of sincerity coupled with deep and true humility.

K. McLaurin.

Parkstone. The St. Aldhelm's Drama Guild has enjoyed, among other activities of its first autumn, a valuable talk on voice control from the Chaplain. We have also made a rewarding experiment with a Reading, prepared beforehand and presented " unseen " to a darkened auditorium, with sound effects in place of stage directions or commentary. From *The Fortieth Man,* by Freda Collins, our first try-out in this form, the Guild hopes to proceed to scenes from Shakespeare presented with the same technique. *Poole Cockles,* our own small topical skit, seems to be getting under way. And lastly, St. Aldhelm's has been asked to prepare one of four demonstration scenes for the week-end School of Religious Drama in Poole, to be held at the end of April.

H. M. R.

Cleadon. The All Saints' Players, Cleadon, nr. Sunderland, played Laurence Housman's *Bethlehem* on the afternoon and evening of December 21st in All Saints' Church, Cleadon, to a large congregation. They repeated their performance on the following Sunday evening, in St. Nicholas' Church, Hedworth.

Miss P. A. Suggett *Sec.*

Portsmouth. The Linden Players are both pioneers and learners. Their recent production, which introduced local audiences to Ghéon's *Christmas in the Market-place,* showed the advances made by this small and devoted group as a result of conscientious training. Our observer writes that the peculiar qualities of this play were well served by their balanced interpretation, which augurs well for the worthy presentation of the same author's *Way of the Cross* now in rehearsal for Passiontide.

Liverpool. Mr. H. S. Atfield has been appointed Hon. Secretary to the Bishop of Liverpool's Advisory Committee on Religious Drama in succession to Rev. Francis Glendenning, who has moved to Sheffield. Groups wishing to affiliate with R.D.S. through this Diocesan Committee should apply to Mr. Atfield at 3 Linnet Lane, Sefton Park, Liverpool 17. The Committee is organizing a week-end School of Religious Drama in April at which Carina Robins and Elizabeth Heward will be the instructors.

Southwark. The Cathedral authorities provided a minor drama festival over the Christmas season. Two productions were given in the Cathedral itself: *Ye serve the Lord Christ* played by the finely-trained scholars of Elmhurst School, Camberley, and Masefield's *The Coming of Christ,* produced by Martin Browne with the special music by Holst.

To the chapter-house *Drama Christi,* directed by Rev. Rex Parkin, brought their lively production of Ghéon's *Christmas in the Market-place,* and the local drama group attached to the Cathedral presented a version of the Coventry Nativity under the guidance of Kathleen Barry.

Between them, these four presentations—at their different levels of technical accomplishment—gave unusual opportunities of surveying the wide range of dramatic treatments of the Christmas story.

" Drama Christi." This title is becoming deservedly well known in London and the Home Counties. During Christmas and Epiphany many new friends welcomed the chance of seeing their work in *Christmas in the Market-place,* by Henri Ghéon, an exceptionally interesting production as the performances in church enabled them to present the play as written, including the two last acts.

Their play this Lent will again be *The Way of the Cross* for which a large number of dates have already been booked—some of them far beyond the boundaries of their own Diocese of St. Albans. Details about their activities may be had from their director, Rev. Rex Parkin, The Vicarage, King's Langley, Herts.

" . . . is silence ". We go to press before details of many Christmas productions have reached us. But it is clear that a very great number and variety of plays have been given all over the British Isles.

The R.D.S. plays, *Beginning of the Way* and *The Flight*, have found more producers than ever before, and Nora Ratcliff's *Nativity* has been rightly popular. We were glad to note, also, performances of P. J. Lamb's *Sons of Adam*, Dorothy Sayers' *He That Should Come*, Evelyn Hart's *The First Crib* and Agnes Senior's *That Night* (an excellent play for children), among many others.

R.D.S. NEWS AND NOTICES

The ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of members was held in the Mercury Theatre, London, at 2.30 p.m. on November 21st, 1947, with Miss Athene Seyler in the chair.

Seventy-six members were re-elected, and Rev. Robert Duce, Miss Eileen Younghusband and the Hon. Camilla Wedgwood were newly elected, to the Council for 1948.

After discussion of a Resolution regarding the manner of electing councillors, and in the light of an amendment that was sympathetically heard before it was ruled out of order on technical grounds, the Meeting decided to leave the matter open for further consideration.

Mr. Martin Browne reviewed the past year's developments and gave the meeting many facts and ideas to ponder and act upon. Our present Editorial enlarges upon many of them.

There followed an interesting performance of the first act (The Betrothal) from Henri Ghéon's *The Marriage of St. Francis*. Our sincere thanks are due to the Rev. Rex Parkin and *Drama Christi* for giving us their good services at short notice and to Mr. Pearmain and the Mercury Theatre staff for their generous co-operation.

SUMMER SCHOOL, 1948. — CHICHESTER

The Society is arranging a School of Religious Drama for the week July 23rd–30th, 1948, with Carina Robins as Organizer. We are most fortunate in having secured Bishop Otter College, Chichester, for the occasion.

As before, the Course will be planned primarily for producers working with church groups, clubs, Sunday and day-schools, but it will appeal to those of all the churches who are interested in the principles and practice of Drama in relation to Religion. Resident Anglican and Free Church chaplains will conduct daily services.

Distinguished visitors are being invited to lecture upon a variety of subjects and the resident staff will again form a team of four expert instructors, namely :—**Pamela Keily** (Religious Drama Adviser to the Association of Christian Communities in Sheffield), **Susan Pearson** (Fellow and Examiner, Institute of Mime, specializing in Dramatic work with schools and clubs), **Douglas Remington** (late of the Pilgrim Players), and **Guy Vaesen** (Stage Director, Birmingham Repertory Theatre).

In spite of the increased cost of living and overhead expenses, the Society has decided against making any increase in students' fees this year, which again will be (inclusive): R.D.S. Members (including members of affiliated groups) 6½ guineas, Non-members 7½ guineas.

This decision, coupled with a determination to maintain the high standards of former schools, means that to avoid loss the Society relies absolutely on filling the school to capacity. This will be certain if members will co-operate in helping us to advertise the school. Leaflets (like the one enclosed with this magazine) will be supplied on demand for distribution. Offers to assist in this way will be most welcome.

But the accommodation is limited, and a number of places are being reserved for men students, so those who wish to come are advised to apply early.

Bishop Otter College has fine buildings and spacious grounds; surrounded by lovely country, it is within easy reach of the town and Cathedral and not very far from the sea. It is fitting, too, that R.D.S. members should take their Holiday Training in the centre of the diocese responsible for so much good pioneering work in religious drama at the instigation of the Society's President (the Bishop of Chichester) and under the guidance of Martin Browne.

For application forms and further details please write to the School Secretary, Miss Freda Collins, c/o R.D.S. Office.

DO IT NOW.

EDINBURGH.

The Society hopes also to arrange a smaller Advanced Course in Religious Drama at Edinburgh for some thirty experienced students. This school, planned in connection with the 1948 Edinburgh Festival, will be directed by **Martin Browne,** who hopes to draw his staff from those engaged in the Festival. No definite announcement can yet be made, but it is hoped to run the school during the week September 4th–11th. Tuition at the Gateway Theatre: resident accommodation at St. Colm's Missionary College. Further particulars—as soon as these are available—from Carina Robins, R.D.S. office.

LIBRARY.

Will members please note that the Library will be closed for stocktaking from May 17th–31st, 1948, and no books can be issued during this time. It will greatly assist the Librarian if members will return all books which they are not using before May 17th.

The following books have been added to the Library since November:—

Plays

Choose Your Star! H. M. Richards, G.F.S. Central Office. 1/6. 4 w. A modern morality.

A City not Forsaken. Margaret Taylor. Deane. 1/6. Large cast of women. Man's voice. A humanistic pageant. Useful for Women's Institutes, etc.

**Death of a Traitor.* Anthony Merryn. S.P.C.K./R.D.S. 3/-. Two acts. 6 m., 2 w., clergy, soldiers, beggars. A fine play in verse form on Sir Thomas More, raising political and religious problems of importance to the modern world.

The Encounter at Elah. Derrick Cuthbert. Lutterworth Press. 1/6. 8 boys. This scene from the life of David should be useful for Youth Clubs.

The Eternal Messenger. C. S. Tatham. Girl Guide Association. 26–30 girls, Holy Fear, Archangel. Nine scenes with prologue and epilogue. Nativity play in a Guide framework.

**Farce of the Devil's Bridge.* (Typescript.) Henri Ghéon. Translated by Barry Jackson. Founded upon the Legend of St. Kado. From the Répertoire of the Comagnons de Notre Dame. 5 m., 1 w. (silent).

The First Commandment. Joyce Reason. Edinburgh House. 1/-. 3 m., 4 w. Three acts. Technically a missionary play though the interest hinges on the characters of the Christian doctor and his love story.

**John Bunyan.* V. A. PEARN. (From *More Selected One-act Plays.*) Harrap. 4/-. 10 m., 3 w., 2 b., 3 g. Four scenes. Episodic. Written for a Children's Hour Broadcast.

A Little Pageant of the Nativity. F. H. DRINKWATER. Burnes and Oates. 18 children.

Noble Bandit. (Typescript.) THEODORA CHADWICK. A Chinese Comedy for Children. 6 g., 2 b.

Saint Christopher. N. JULIAN ELLIOTT. Lutterworth Press. 1/6. 13 m., 3 w., the Child. Two scenes.

Story Told in Indiana. BETTY SMITH. In *More Selected One-act Plays.* Harrap. 4/-. 4 m., 1 w. Abraham Lincoln at twenty-one.

New Sets

**Death of a Traitor.* ANTHONY MERRYN.

**In Three Days.* Anon.

In Typescript:—

**Assumption of the Blessed Virgin.* From the York Cycle of Mystery Plays.

**Farce of the Devil's Bridge.* HENRI GHÉON.

**Journey of the Three Kings.* HENRI GHÉON.

Reference Books and Others

**British Drama.* An historical survey from the beginnings to the present time, by ALLARDYCE NICOLL. Fourth Edition revised. George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd. 12/6.

Christ in the Drama. A Study of the influence of Christ on the Drama of England and America. FRED EASTMAN. New York: The Macmillan Company.

**The Playway of Speech Training.* RODNEY BENNETT. Evans Bros. Ltd. 3/9.

Scripture Teaching. Illustrated by models and objects. FRED KITCHIN. A help to property making. C. of E. Sunday School Institute.

Looking at a Play. W. BRIDGES-ADAMS. Phoenix House Ltd., London. 3/6.

Practical Miming. M. GERTRUDE PICKERSGILL. Sir Isaac Pitman and Son Ltd. 8/6.

**Technique of Stage Lighting.* R. GILLESPIE WILLIAMS. Sir Isaac Pitman and Son Ltd. 21/-.

**X at Oberammergau.* HUMBERT WOLFE. Methuen and Co. Ltd. 1935.

**Understanding Drama.* CLEANTH BROOKS and ROBERT B. HEILMAN. Harrap. 12/6.

* *Included in recommended list.*

CHRISTIAN DRAMA is the quarterly magazine of the RELIGIOUS DRAMA SOCIETY. *President*: The Lord Bishop of Chichester. *Chairman of Executive*: E. Martin Browne. *Chairman of Council*: Miss Athene Seyler. *Travelling Adviser*: Miss Carina Robins. *Librarian*: Miss K. Bainbridge-Bell. *Secretary*: T. G. Bartholomew. All enquiries and applications for membership should be addressed to The Secretary, R.D.S., S.P.C.K. House, Northumberland Avenue, W.C. 2.

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